



South Central District Health

Keeping your family & community healthy

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BRUCELLOSIS

What is brucellosis?

Brucellosis is a disease that can be spread from infected animals to man. It is caused by bacteria called Brucella.

Who gets brucellosis?

In the United States, brucellosis usually occurs in people who work in slaughterhouses or on farms. Veterinarians may also be at risk for this disease.

How is brucellosis spread?

Humans get brucellosis from animals and not from other people. People usually get brucellosis by handling the tissues, blood, urine, vaginal discharges, aborted fetuses, and placentas of infected animals. Drinking raw milk and eating dairy products made from raw milk can also lead to brucellosis.

What are the symptoms of brucellosis?

A variety of symptoms may appear with this disease. Brucellosis causes a flu-like illness with fever, chills, headache, body aches, and weakness. The fever may go up and down over a 24-hour period (another name for brucellosis is undulant fever). Other symptoms may also occur, including weight loss, loss of appetite, and prolonged fatigue.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

This varies from 5 days to several months. Symptoms commonly appear 1 to 2 months after exposure.

How does the bacteria enter the human body?

Brucella can enter the body through the mouth, nose, eyes, and through cuts or breaks in the skin. Drinking milk that has not been pasteurized or eating dairy products made from raw milk (butter, whipped cream, soft cheeses) may also lead to infection.

How is brucellosis diagnosed and treated?

Early diagnosis and treatment is important. Blood tests are usually required to diagnose the disease. The doctor should be told about any contact with animals or animal products that might be infected. Treatment usually consists of taking antibiotics for three weeks or longer. It is very important to take the medication for the whole time, even if the symptoms go away. Otherwise, you may experience a relapse that might be harder to treat.

How can brucellosis be prevented?

Anyone assisting at the birth of a calf or handling a newborn calf should wear disposable or rubber gloves and coveralls. Rubber gloves should be thoroughly disinfected and coveralls washed in hot soapy water. A disinfectant should be used in cleaning up after assisting a cow with delivery. Any aborted fetuses from a cow should be burned or buried. Only drink pasteurized milk.